THE *Nature, Obligation,* and *Measures* OF *CONSCIENCE,* Deliver'd In A SERMON PREACH'D At *Leiceſter,* AT THE *ASSIZES Held There, July* 25th, 1706.

By *HENRY SACHEVERELL,* M. A. Fellow of *Magdalen-College,* OXON.

Publiſh'd at the Requeſt of the Gentlemen of the *Grand-Jury.*

OXFORD:
Printed by *Leon. Lichfield,* for *John Stephens,* Bookſeller: And are to be Sold by *James Knapton* at the *Crowne* in St. *Paul's* Church-yard, LONDON. 1706.

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To the RIGHT WORSHIPFUL

CHARLES MORRIS, Esq;

HIGH-SHERIFF of the *County* of

LEICESTER,

AND TO

The Honourable Gentlemen of the *Grand-Jury*,

Sir *William Villiers*, Bart.
Sir *Gilbert Pickering*, Bart.
Sir *Richard Halford*, Bart.
Sir *George Beaumont*, Bart.
Sir *William Halford*, Kt. *and* Bart.
Sir *Edward Wigley*, Knt.
Edward Smith, Esq;
James Winstanley, Esq;
George Ashby, Esq;
Charles Jennings, Esq;
Thomas Skeffington, Esq;
Robert Wilson, Esq;
Rowland Browne, Esq;
Bartlett Streete, Esq;
James Halsall, Esq;
William Hartopp, Esq;
William Welles, Gent.
Leonard Vow, Gent.

GENTLEMEN,

IF *This Discourse has any thing Considerable, to Recommend it to the World, it is chiefly Owing to Your* Favour, *and* Indul-

dulgence, *as having had the* Honour *of Your* Patience, *in its* Delivery, *and Your Joint* Commands, *for Its* Publication.

I wiſh, I had Treated this Weighty Subject *Equal to Its* Dignity: *it being ſo* Neceſſary *to be Thoroughly Underſtood, at a Time, when the* Confederate Adverſaries *of Our* Church, *Preſume as much to* Found Dominion *in* Conſcience, *as They did formerly in* Grace: *when They not only Plead the* Liberty *of the* One, *to* Reſiſt *and* Quench

Quench *the* Other, *but by countenancing a* Form of Godlineſs, Deny the Power thereof, *and* Deſtroy *the very* Subſtance *of* Religion, *under a* Specious Appearance *of* Defending *it.*

But whatever Succeſs, my Endeavours in this Matter, may meet with, it is the Peculiar Happineſs, *and* Advantage *of the* Church of England, *that it can* yet, *notwithſtanding all* Oppoſition, Glory *in ſo many* Unblemiſh'd Patriots, *and* Undaunted Champions *for the*

Sup-

Support *of its* Conſtitution; *whoſe* Lives *are the Beſt* Illuſtrations *of its* Doctrines; *whoſe* Merits *are as* Great *and* Conſpicuous *as their* Fortunes; *whoſe* Conſcience *is as* Unſullied *as their* Honour; *and who, by the* Juſtice, *and* Regularity *of Their* Principles, *and* Actions, *have Compleated the* Character *of a* True Chriſtian, *as well as* That *of an* Accompliſh'd Gentleman.

Were the Shining Examples *You give to Mankind, as Happily* Imitated *by All Perſons of the* ſame

ſame Rank, *and* Condition, *neither Our* Church, *or* State, *wou'd have Reaſon to Fear any* Danger *from its* Avow'd Enemies, *or* Pretended Friends: *and that You may Live long to* Controul, *and* Fruſtrate *the* Deſigns *of* Both, *is the Hearty Wiſh of*

GENTLEMEN,

Your moſt Humble Servant,

HENRY SACHEVERELL.

The Epistle Dedicatory.

THE *Nature, Obligation,* and *Meaſures* OF *CONSCIENCE.*

Acts xxiii. 1.

And Paul *earneſtly beholding the Council, ſaid, Men and Brethren, I have liv'd in all Good* CONSCIENCE, *before God, until this Day.*

THESE Words are as 'twere a ſhort Hiſtory, and compendious Character of the Life of That Great Apoſtle St. *Paul;* and of the *Upright and Sincere Conſcience,* that Adorn'd every Action in it. This was his Efficacious and Triumphant Argument, which he ſo Boldly urges in his Vindication; that he was Able to *inſiſt* upon his *Integrity,* and *appeal* for its Proof to a *Tryal* before GOD, *the Searcher of all Hearts,* and the whole World, the viſible Witneſſes of his Practice; that *He had kept a Conſcience void of*

Offence, towards God, and towards Men. 'Twas *This* that Fortify'd him with ſuch a Manly Spirit, and Unſhaken Courage, to Outface all the malicious Accuſations of his inſidious *Perſecutors*, to Bear up with a ſteady Chearfulneſs againſt the many Miſeries and Diſaſters of a troubleſome Life, and put to Silence the Reproaches of his moſt implacable Enemies. When we ſee him *Arraign'd* before the inſulting *Jews*, from whom he cou'd as little expect *Juſtice*, as *Mercy*, how did *This* Aſtoniſh *Felix*, that Luſtful and Covetous Magiſtrate, who thought to have Condemn'd him, and made the *Affrighted Judge Tremble*, inſtead of his *Suppos'd Criminal*? Such is the Power of a pure and unblemiſh'd *Conſcience*; it caſts a diſtinguiſhing Luſtre, and amiable Regard upon its Poſſeſſor, can *dignify Chains* and *Fetters*, turn a *Priſon* into a *Palace*, render *Poverty*, and even *Diſgrace*, *Honourable*, and command *Reverence* and *Eſteem* from its moſt malignant *Adverſaries*. To *obtain* and *preſerve* which invaluable Bleſſing, no Difficulties or Labours can be ſo Painful, no Dangers or Diſtreſſes ſo Afflicting, no Suffering or Death ſo Sharp and Bitter, but what it will Suſtain, Alleviate, and moſt amply Reward.

The niceſt and moſt *important Enquiry*, that the *Mind* can be *imploy'd* in, both for its *Improve-*

provement and *Satisfaction*, is a *juſt Search* into its *own State* and *Nature*; whereby it may be capable of *Diſcovering* its own *Graces* and *Infirmities*, to *Correct* the *One*, and *Advance* the *Other*, and to *Ground* it ſelf upon a *rational Peace*, and ſecure Tranquillity. Tho' indeed this requires no ſmall *Art* and *Care*, thus to make the *Soul* deſcend and retire into *her-ſelf*, bend all her *Faculties inwards*, and become the nearer Object of *her own* Contemplation; To *dive* into her own obſcure Receſſes and Manſions, and Trace through all the intricate *Folds* and *Windings* of the *Heart*, to Unveil its *lurking Hypocriſy*, *Traverſe* its *Springs* and *Motions*, and to *let a Light* into thoſe *dark Corners* of *Iniquity*, where Vice is firſt *hatch'd* and *conceiv'd*. Without this *Spiritual Scrutiny*, this *Domeſtick Inquiſition* (as we may call it) in our Breaſt, a Man's *Life* can be never *juſt* and *regular*, or his Actions *even* and *ſelf-conſiſtent*, as being *Guided* by no *Law*, and Directed by no *Conduct*. Therefore every Man that pretends to the *right Uſe* of his *Reaſon*, and does not Live and Act at Random, muſt think himſelf concern'd to *eſtabliſh* a *Certain Sett of Fundamental Notions and Principles* in his Thoughts; which upon a thorough Search, and mature Deliberation, he lays down and ſettles, as the *eternal Baſis* and

Touchſtone of Truth, as an unalterable *Scheme* and *Model* of *Morality* to himſelf, and as the *controuling*, and *governing Maxims* of his *practical Behaviour*. This is what he Dignifies with the awful Title of CONSCIENCE, and is That *internal Compaſs* of his Soul, by which he Profeſſes to *ſteer* the *whole Courſe* and *Tenour* of his Actions.

Now from the infinite *Multiplicity*, and *Variety* of *Opinions*, wherein Mens *Minds* as much *differ* as their *Features*, there may ſeem to Ariſe as many *Sorts* of *Conſciences*, as there are *Diverſity* of *Judgments* in the World: Hence we find *Vertues* and *Vices* taking their ſeveral *Colours* and *Denominations*, according to the different *Capacity*, or *Uſe* of *Reaſon*, the ſundry *Tempers*, *Inclinations*, *Intereſts* and *Deſigns* of *Parties*, that Form and Eſpouſe *ſuch and ſuch Jarring Sentiments*. So that he who takes an impartial Survey of all the multifarious, unaccountable, and repugnant *Concluſions* of Mankind, and their *Deportment* Conſequent thereupon, and conſiders their irreconcileable Contrariety to each other; and yet ſees with what tenacious *Confidence*, and perverſe *Obſtinacy*, they are on all ſides *embrac'd* and *aſſerted*, will be inclinable to ſuſpect, That there is no ſuch Thing as *True Conſcience* in the World; or

that

that Men are not yet *Agreed* in the *Meaning* of This *amuſing*, but *unintelligible Word*: A *Word*, the *Force* of which, is much ſooner *felt* than *underſtood*, that ſtrikes the *Senſes*, deeper than the *Judgment*; and uſually carries in it all the *Miſchief*, that *Ignorance* and *Prejudice*, blind *Zeal*, and inveterate *Malice*, *Enthuſiaſm*, and *Superſtition* are able to Attempt and Execute. Upon which account, this *miſtaken* Word, *Conſcience*, has bin often found to be no better than a *meer Sound and Shadow*, to *diſguiſe* the moſt Fatal and Deviliſh *Impoſtures*, to *cover* the blackeſt *Treaſon* and *Rebellion*, *Hereſy*, *Schiſm*, and *Blaſphemy*; and *ſhelter* the moſt *aſtoniſhing Impiety* under its *ſpecious*, *and ſanctify'd Umbrage*. For what elſe is it, that has bin the Cauſe of almoſt all the *Civil Wars*, *Perſecutions*, and *Maſſacres*, that for ſo many Years involv'd *Chriſtendom* in *Blood* and *Fury*, Deſtroy'd ſo many *Princes*, and *Churches*, with *Regicide*, and *Sacriledge*, *depopulated* ſo many *Dominions*, and *laviſh'd* ſo much *Treaſure*; and in a manner *Overturn'd* the very *Foundations* of *Chriſtianity*, under the *Goodly Pretence* of Religion? What is it, I ſay, but this *Word*, *Conſcience*, *Miſunderſtood* and *Miſapply'd*, which like an *Holy Sham*, or rather *Diabolical Inſpiration*, has ſeiz'd and *poſſeſs'd* the *giddy*, and *ſenſeleſs Multitude*, with *Infatuation*, and

Phren-

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Phrenzy, and driven them Headlong into their *Own*, and their *Country's* Perdition? Nothing certainly has brought *greater Calamities* upon the World, or led the way to more *dangerous Miſtakes*, than the want of a *due Diſtinction* in its *Nature*, and a *juſt Limitation* of it, in its *Rights* and *Power*. Which as 'tis a weighty Subject, proper for all Times, as containing the *Grounds* of our *Happineſs* or *Miſery*, as well in *this World* as *the next*; ſo I preſume, it may be in no wiſe *Unſuitable* to the *preſent Solemnity*, which may frequently have no ſmall Share in the *Examination* of its *Pretences*, in order to the *right Adminiſtration of Juſtice*, by the unqueſtionable *Authority* of ſuch *Legal Magiſtrates*, as we are bound to *ſubmit to, not only for Wrath, but Conſcience ſake*. I ſhall therefore within as *little* a Compaſs, as the *Copiouſneſs* of this *large Point*, and the *ſmall Portion* of Time allow'd me will permit, endeavour

I. Firſt, To Enquire into the True *Nature*, and the Juſt *Bounds*, and *Meaſures* of *Conſcience*.

II. Secondly, To Propoſe ſome Conſiderations, whereby a *falſe* and *erroneous Conſcience* may be Diſtinguiſh'd from a *ſincere* and *true One*.

III.

III. Thirdly, To lay down those *General Laws*, whereby the *Conscience* is to be *Regulated*, and shew how they ought to be *Apply'd*.

I. And First, I will Enquire into the *true Nature*, and the *just Bounds*, and *Measures* of *Conscience*. And this I shall do, *First*, from *Scripture*, and, *Secondly*, from *Reason*.

Some of the *School-Men*, as well as Others, of the *Ancient*, and *Modern Writers* of *Casuistical Divinity*, in their Speculations on this Subject, have not undeservedly, bin Tax'd for *Darkning* it with so many *unnecessary frivolous*, and *intricate* Notions, that they seem rather to have endeavour'd to *confound*, and *perplex* Mens Minds, with *impertinent Doubts* and *Difficulties*, than to propose such *Remedies*, as might effectually *solve* their *Scruples*, and *Fears*. Tho' the *Scripture* is so very *clear* and *plain* in this Matter, that from the frequent *Use* and *Energy* of this Word, *Conscience*, therein, it will be found to carry this *General Import* in it, namely, *The Knowledge of a* NATURAL, *or* DIVINE *Law, join'd with an Application of it, to some particular Instance of Practice, to which it is adequately suited, and adapted.* Out of the many Places that occur

occur in the *New Teſtament*, to eſtabliſh this Notion of *Conſcience*, it may be ſufficient to quote one or two, which give in the Senſe of the reſt. St. *Paul*, in his *Epiſtle to the Romans*, Chap. II. v. 14, 15, 16. ſpeaking of the *Gentiles*, who had no other *Guide* of their Actions, but the *Law of Nature*, or *Reaſon rightly inform'd*, expreſly declares, that *this* was to them, the *Rule of their Conſcience*, whereby they were to be *Judg'd* at the laſt Day, and *Acquitted* or *Condemn'd*. *For* (ſays he) *when the Gentiles which have not the Law* (that is the *Moſaick* or *Reveal'd* Law) *do by* NATURE *the things contain'd in the Law, theſe having not the Law, are a Law unto themſelves; which ſhew the Work of the Law written in their Hearts, their* CONSCIENCE *alſo bearing witneſs, and their thoughts the mean while* ACCUSING, *or elſe* EXCUSING *one another, in the Day when God ſhall judge the Secrets of Men, by Jeſus Chriſt, according to my Goſpel.* In the ſame Chapter, *v.* 12. Diſcourſing concerning the State of the *Jews*, who had the *Lively Oracles of God's written Word*, and the *Law* of *Moſes* ſuperinduc'd upon the *Law* of *Reaſon*, to illuſtrate and inlarge it, ſays, *as many as have ſinn'd in the Law, ſhall be judg'd by the Law*, which extends the *Obligation of Conſcience*, with regard

to

to them, from the *Law of Nature* to that of a further *Reveal'd, Poſitive Law.* But in his *Epiſtle to Titus*, c. I. v. 15. the *Apoſtle* ſpeaking concerning the State of Chriſtianity, that had the Supream Priviledge of an *entire Revelation* of the *Divine Law*, he ſays, of *Errors in Judgment*, and *Practice*, *Unto the Pure all things are Pure, but unto them that are Defil'd and unbelieving, is nothing Pure, but even their Mind and Conſcience is Defil'd*, where we find νοῦς *Mind* added to συνείδησις *Conſcience*, to Explain and Adjuſt its Meaning, denoting the *Intellectual Faculty* of the *Soul*, Judging upon any *Moral Point*, together with an *Application* of it to *Practice*. So that here is a *Complex* and *Relative Idea*, carrying a *double Notion* in it of *Conſcience*, which with Reſpect to its *Operation*, is alſo *Twofold*. *Firſt*, Relating to what is *paſs'd*, *Judging* it ſelf to have either done *Well*, or *Ill*; or *Secondly*, Relating to its *preſent Duty*, *Adviſing* and *Directing* us, in the *Neceſſity*, *Legality*, or *Illegality* of any thing, that *ought to be done*, or *not done* by us. Which Diviſion reſults from the Two *Faculties*, or rather *Reflex Actions* of the Soul, in *Contemplating* and *Judging* what is *preſent*, or in *Deliberating* on what is Paſs'd, either *Juſtifying* and *Acquitting*, or *Accuſing* and *Condemning*

ing us before *God* and Our *Conſcience*. Under one of theſe Two Notions, moſt Places in the *New Teſtament*, and thoſe that may ſeem to correſpond to them in *the Old*, are Underſtood.

This is the *Short* and *General* Account that *Revelation* has given us of this Matter; and it would have bin well, if Men had *Reſted* here, and bin Contented with the *plain* and *eaſy Determinations* of the *Scriptures*; which had left *no Room* for *Doubts* and *Ambiguities*, and had prevented all thoſe *Sophiſtical Subtleties*, which have bin ſince *Invented* by Men of *Jeſuitical*, and *Fanatical* Brains; who have *Refin'd* the expreſs *Rules* of *Human Duty* into Whimſical and Inexplicable *Theories*; have Clogg'd and Surrounded it with uſeleſs and ſurprizing *Queſtions*, Spinoſe *Obſtacles*, and abſtruſe *Diſtinctions*, laid in the Dark, as ſo many *Myſtical Snares*, and *Spiritual Gins* to *catch* Men's *Conſciences*, and Plunge 'em into the unfathomable Abyſs of God's *Preſcience*, *Decrees*, and *Predeſtination*; Things which the Thoughts of Men, *which are not as God's thoughts*, can never Fix or Determine. Theſe *Legerdemain Craftsmen* in Divinity, *who thus Handle the Word of God deceitfully*, ought juſtly to Inherit the Woes denounc'd by God, (*Ezekiel*, Chap. 13.) againſt *their Brethren*, the falſe Prophets, *Who Dawb'd with untem-*

temper'd Mortar, propheſy'd out of their Own Hearts, follow'd their Own Spirit, ſaw Vanity and Divin'd Lyes, ſeducing the People. Will Ye Pollute Me (ſays GOD) *among my People, for handfuls of Barley and for pieces of Bread, to ſlay the ſouls that ſhould not dye, and to ſave the ſouls alive that ſhould not live by Your Lying to my People that hear Your Lyes?* Wherefore thus ſaith the Lord God, *Behold I am againſt Your Pillows, wherewith Ye there Hunt the Souls to make 'em fly, and I will tear them from Your Arms, and will let the Souls go, even the Souls that Ye hunt to make 'em fly. Becauſe with Lyes Ye have made the Heart of the Righteous ſad, whom I have not made ſad, and ſtrengthen'd the hands of the Wicked, that He ſhou'd not return from his wicked way by promiſing him Life.* How Applicable is this Character to thoſe Men, who inſtead of ſerving the Great Purpoſes of Morality, and Religion, which ought to be *repreſented* as *Eaſy*, and *Practicable*, as 'tis *Inviting*, and *Agreeable* (which certainly Raiſes both the *Dignity*, and *Excellency* of the *Law*, and *ſupream Legiſlatour*,) when They ſhould have helpt the *Lame*, and *Blind*, out of the *Pit* they were faln into, and aſſiſted the *Infirmities*, and *Neceſſities* of the *Weak*, and *Impotent*, Intangle 'em deeper in the Mire,

Enhancing their *Miseries*, *Exaggerating* their *Guilt*, Frightening 'em with *false Appehensions*, and *Imaginary Scruples*, and in a Word *Raising that Devil*, which they were never Able again sufficiently to *Lay*. These are doubtless *faithful Pastors, and Stewards of God's holy Mysteries*, who *feed* his Servants with *Stones* instead of *Bread*, and in lieu of a *wholsom* and *heavenly* Repast of his *Word*, set before 'em, noisome *Serpents*, and deadly *Scorpions*!

But to Proceed, Let us see how far the Plain *Principles of Reason*, and *Argumentation*, will carry Us in the Discovery of the *True Nature* of this Point. Upon a Survey of it, We shall find, that all the *Modes*, or *Affections*, of either the *Mind*, or *Conscience*, which are only so many *Different States*, or *Degrees* of its *Operation*, will be Comprehended under These *Four*, Namely,

1. *A Clear, Upright, and well-Instructed Conscience.*
2. *A Probable Conscience.*
3. *A Doubtful, or Scrupulous Conscience.*
4. *An Erroneous Conscience.*

These Four *Sorts* of *Consciences*, take their *Rise* from, and are *Grounded* upon the *Different Evidence* of any *Practical Object*, pro-

pos'd

pos'd to the *Mind*, and the *Clearneſs*, and *Diſtinction*, or the *Obſcurity*, and *Confuſion*, of the *Ideas* that it Frames thereof.

1. If the Matter it Deliberates upon, be a Thing in its *Nature*, *Plain*, and *Intelligible*, not Incumber'd with Difficulties, and Doubts, and ſuch as appears either *Neceſſary*, or *Lawful* to be done, and conſequently a *Duty*; or *Illegal*, and *Neceſſary to be Abſtain'd* from, and conſequently a *Sin*; as on the *One* Hand *Prohibited*, or on the *Other Injoin'd*, by *Divine*, *Human*, or *Moral* Laws; and a Man Acts accordingly in all theſe *Caſes*, with a *Full Perſwaſion* of Mind, and the *Aſſent* of his *Conſcience*, *Guiding* and *Governing* it ſelf by ſuch *Rules*, as are *adequate*, and *ſuited* to its ſeveral Actions; ſuch a Perſon certainly goes upon the *Principles* of a *Sincere*, *Upright*, and *truly Inſtructed Conſcience*.

2. But, *Secondly*, if the Matter propos'd to the Mind, has not this *Clearneſs*, and *Evidence* in it ſelf, either through the *Intricacies*, it may be Involv'd in by its *Nature*, or the *Obſcurity*, and *Ambiguity* of its *Circumſtances*, or the *Want* of a *Full*, and *Exact Diſtinction*, in the *Law*, *Prohibiting*, or *Injoining*: the Underſtanding having fully *Weigh'd* the *Doubts*, and

and *Objections* on all Sides, and *Ballanc'd* the Matter with all the *Juſtice* and *Equity* that it can; and finding the *Reaſons* on the *One* hand *Preponderating* thoſe on the *Other:* upon ſuch an *Impartial* Survey, and *Scrutiny*, the *Conſcience* Determining on the *Probable* Part, proceeds according to Its *Judgment*, and Acts upon the Deciſion of *Argument*, and *Colour*, not Apprehending any *Apparent Evil*, expreſs *Illegality*, or *Inexpediency* in its Action. This is the *Probable Conſcience*, and will Juſtify where all *proper Means* are us'd for its *Inſtruction.*

3. But, *Thirdly*, if the Mind upon a Survey of All Sides, finds it ſelf *Pois'd* in an *Equilibrium* betwixt *Both*; if the *Reaſons* appear *equally clear*, *ſtrong*, and *convincing* on *Either* Side, and it knows not how to *Judge*, or *Determine* its *Election*, and the Law relating to this Matter, may be either *dubious*, *equivocal*, *indifferent*, or perhaps *ſilent:* if the *Conſcience* hangs thus under a State of *Neutrality*, and as 'twere *declines* and *ſuſpends* its *Conſent*, and yet the Perſon *Act* without it, this is a *Doubting Conſcience*, and the Man under its *Conduct* is Guilty of *Sin*, if He Does ſo. But if it does *Aſſent*, His Action is ſo far *Juſtifiable*, as it appears not *Offending* againſt any *Poſitive*,

and

and *plain Prohibition*, or *Law*. For the *Negative* being of Infinite Extent, and Latitude, makes Great and Juſt Room for *Allowances*, in theſe *dubious Caſes*. But if the *Conſcience apprehends*, or *ſuſpects*, any *Evil* (tho' perhaps *Falſe*) in the Matter of its Action, otherwiſe in *it ſelf Legal*, which is the *Caſe* of a *Scrupulous Conſcience*, it is under an *Obligation* of *Not-Acting*, becauſe no Action is *Juſtifiable*, that is *Againſt*, or *Without* the *Conſent* of the *Mind*.

4. But, *Laſtly*, if the *Mind* is not *Rightly Inſtructed*, or *Inform'd*, as to the *Matter* of its *Action*, and frames a *wrong Judgment* of its *Legality*, or *Illegality*, from a *falſe*, or *confus'd Apprehenſion* of, or *Ignorance* in, the *Law*, and *Nature* of the *Action*, or is diſtorted, or miſled, by *Paſſion*, *Prejudice*, *Intereſt*, *Pride*, *Luſt*, or any other *ſiniſter Means*, this is an *Erroneous Conſcience*, bringing always *Guilt* upon the *Actor*, and Involving Him in *Sin*, according to that Receiv'd *Maxim*, That, *the Ignorance of the Law can never Excuſe a Delinquent*.

Now the *Firſt* of theſe *Conſciences* proceeds upon either *Faith*, or *Demonſtration*, the Infallible *Revelation* of *God*, or the certain *Meaſures* of *Reaſon*.

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The *Second* proceeds upon the Grounds of *Probable*, or *Moral Certainty*, a *Rational Belief*, Perſwaſion, or Opinion.

The *Third* cannot Proceed but according to the *Degrees* of *Aſſent*, or *Election*, and

The *Fourth* proceeds upon *Ignorance* or *Error*.

This I hope may ſeem to be no *obſcure* or *indiſtinct* Account of the *Nature* of *Conſcience*, as taking in, all its *Properties*, conſider'd under the *Principles* of *Reaſon*, and the *Gradual Light*, and different *Advancements*, that *it* makes under Its *Conduct*; and I preſume, this may be the moſt *Natural* and Juſt way of *Explaining* it, and which *clears off* all thoſe *Abſtruſe Perplexities*, other *Myſtical Interpetations* bring upon it. For certainly every Man's *Conſcience*, either *is*, or *ought* to be Govern'd by *Rational Motives*, which are the Supream *Commands* of the *Underſtanding* on its *Subjects*, the *Will*, and *Affections*, never to be *Diſputed*, never to be *Diſobey'd* without *Rebellion* againſt their *ſpiritual Sovereign*.

This being Premis'd, as a *Rational* View of the *Nature* and *Obligation* of *Conſcience* in *General*, and its ſeveral *Parts*, *Modes*, or *Habitudes* in *Particular*, I come in the next place,

II. *Secondly*, To propoſe ſome Conſiderations, whereby a *Falſe*, and *Erroneous Conſcience*, may be Diſtinguiſh'd from a *Sincere*, and *True One*. What has bin before Remark'd, in *Settling* the *Diſtinct Bounds* of *Each*, might be in it ſelf, ſufficient to Diſcover the *Difference*; but perhaps it will appear much more Evident to Thoſe, who for *want* of *Time*, or *Skill*, at firſt View cannot fully *comprehend* Theſe *Abſtracted Notions*, and follow the *Mind* thorough all the Dark *Labyrinth* of its *ſecret Operations*, if We proceed more fully to *Diſplay*, in their proper *Colours*, all thoſe *Falſe Pretences*, that are ſo apt to Delude and put upon Our *Judgments*, and Deceive Us with the *Empty Shadows*, and *Viſionary Appearances* of *Religion*. Among all which there is none, that with ſo much *Artifice* and *Illuſion*, *Palms* the inſnaring *Impoſture* upon Our *credulous Faith*, as the *plauſible Diſguiſe* of *Intereſt*. This will ſo Fatally *Over-rule* the *Conſcience*, ſo *Warp* its Judgment, and *Blind* its *Diſcerning Faculties*, that in time, it will intirely *Depoſe* it from its *Dominion*, and *Uſurp* its *Place* and *Authority*: ſo that *tho' it has Eyes, they ſhall not See; tho' it has Ears, it ſhall not Hear; tho' it has Underſtanding, it ſhall not Underſtand.* In this Caſe a Man *Forfeits* the Exalted *Priviledge* of his *Reaſon*, and *De-*

grades it to the baſe *Servitude* of His *Paſſions;* He Argues, not from His *Underſtanding*, but His *Fleſh* and *Blood*; and how weak the *Demonſtrative* Force of a *Syllogiſm* is, in Oppoſition to the more powerful *Fallacy* of Our *Appetites*, Experience is ſufficient to Convince Us. For, is not this *Intereſt* the *Great Diana* of the World, to whoſe *Silver Shrines* its *Religious Votaries* pay the moſt Devout *Homage*, and implicit Adoration? What is there that the Exorbitant Power of This cannot effect, when it ſhall teach a Man to *Renounce* his *Senſes*, *Careſs Fraud*, *Adore Nonſence*, *Abandon* his *Creed*, and give the *Lye* to the Holy-Spirit of GOD within him? When *Duty* and *Intereſt* Claſh and Interfere, how *Purblind* does it render Our Judgments? how difficult is it to view the Difference? how many Artificial *Quirks*, *Subterfuges*, and *Equivocations*, are immediately found out, to *keep the Peace* betwixt 'em? Such *ſhrew'd Sophiſters* are never at a Loſs for *ſaving Diſtinctions*, *To Keep what they have*, and *Get what They can*: This being the *Grand Maxim*, which *the Wiſe Men of this World* lay down as the Foundation of all their *Politicks*; whereby they are ſo eaſily brought to Comply, and Fall in with ſuch *Principles* and *Practices*, as are moſt likely to Promote it. It is the *Melancholly Amuſement* only

only of *Men of Letters and Philoſophy*, to Live and Feed upon *Ideas*, and Diſpute about *Imaginary Felicity*: Thoſe who can Contemplate *Naked Truth, and Vertue without Reward*, are likely to get Nothing elſe for their Labour; but muſt Expect to be as Contemptible, and Deſtitute, as *Truth*, and *Vertue* uſually are. But the *Children of this World* are taught to be *Wiſer in their Generation than the Children of Light*; they Trouble not themſelves with the *Merit* of their *Cauſe*, or *Party*; they are not Fetter'd, or Confin'd, with the *Little, Strait-lac'd Notions* of rigid *Juſtice*, and *Honeſty*; they are for a *Latitude*, both of *Thought*, and *Action*, a *Licentious Immunity* from *All Legal Reſtraint*; which, with Their *Peculiar Talents of Impudence, and Falſhood*, they ſtick not to call *Liberty of Conſcience*, and preſume to Challenge, as *That Freedom of Will*, which, they ſay, is the *Univerſal Privilege of Mankind*. As if That *Liberty of Conſcience*, which the *Government* has Indulg'd to *ſuch Perſons alone*, whoſe *Real Scruples* will not permit them to join in the *Eſtabliſh'd Communion*, could ever be intended to Shelter ſuch, as have not the leaſt Pretence to the *very Name of Conſcience*; or to impower *Deiſts*, *Socinians*, and *Atheiſts*, to *Revile*, *Ridicule*, and *Blaſpheme* Our moſt *Holy*

Faith, and *Church*, at their Pleaſure, with *Impunity*. Thus Villanouſly are Our *Laws* Abus'd, and this *Sacred Name* play'd upon, to the foul *Diſhonour* of GOD, and the *Diſgrace* of *Religion*; which now a-days is made the *Phariſaical*, and *Puritan Cloak*, like *Samuel's Mantle*, to Amuſe *the Witch*, and Cover the *Devil*, and Conſecrate All *Infidelity*, Injuſtice, *Pride*, *Luſt*, *Avarice*, and *Ambition*, and the moſt execrable Vices of *Hell*, with the Holy Title of *Conſcience*; which, in ſad Truth, is nothing elſe, but the *Vizor-Mask* of *Couſenage*, *Knavery*, and *Hypocriſy*; it is the *ſpiritual Tool* to ſerve the Turn of all wicked Deſigns, meer *Party-Cant*, and *Fanatical Jargon*, the very Sound whereof ſhou'd be a *Warning-Piece* to *Alarm* every *Honeſt Man* to ſtand upon his *Guard*, and *Look about* Him.

Whatever Pretences theſe *Timeſerving* Men may *Gild* their *crafty Stratagems* with, it will be found at laſt, that They are Nothing but downright *Political Atheiſts*: For they are really *Indifferent* to *every Sect*, or *Religion*; Eſpouſe Neither, but as it Suits with their *Advantage*; and, as That *changes*, are *Ready* ſtill to *Obey* its *Motions*, *ſhift* with the *Scene*, *ſwim* with the *Tide*, and *veer* to every *Point* of the *Compaſs*, as the *Wind* that *ſerves* 'em, *com-*

commands. They are as *Diſſonant* in their *Opinions* and *Practices*, as thoſe are *Inconſiſtent* with the Laws of GOD; and, in a Word, on every *Occaſional proſpect of Gain*, are their Own *Reverſe*, and one Continued *Practical-Self-Contradiction*. To Verify this Infamous, and moſt abominable Character, which 'tis a Shame ſhou'd be found in any Nation *profeſſing* the *Name* of *Chriſtian*, have We not, to the *Diſappointment* of both Our Laws, *Civil* and *Eccleſiaſtical*, a *Sett* of *Miſcreants* ſuffer'd amongſt Us, and Thoſe even *pretending* to more *Sanctity* and *Conſcience*, than the reſt of Mankind, who not only Dare *Openly Own*, and *Practice*, but even Preſume to *Juſtify* this *Amphibious Conformity*; who to *Qualify* themſelves for a *paultry Place*, can *ſlyly creep* to thoſe *Altars* they Proclaim *Idolatrous*, Join in a *Communion* they *Revile* as *ſuperſtitious*, and *ſwallow* that *Sacrament*, which at other times they *Refuſe*, as *Damnation*. And, indeed, in this *Tremendous Caſe*, it ought to be the Wiſh of every *charitable Chriſtian*, that they may not, in ſuch a *ſolemn* and *deliberate* Act of the Worſt of *Hypocriſy*, *Eat and Drink their Own Damnation, not Diſcerning the Lord's Body*. Such Men, like *Eſau*, *that Reprobate* of GOD, wou'd doubtleſs Barter their *ſpiritual Birthright* for a *Meſs of Pottage*; like *Gehazi*

they

they will Impudently *Lye*, (and not have ſo much *Shame* as He had to *Diſown* it,) for *Changes of Raiment, and Talents of Silver*: they inherit *Naaman*'s Crime, more *Odious* and *Stinking* than His *Leproſy*; who, to keep his Poſt in the Government, could *bow down in the Houſe of Rimmon, and yet acknowledge the God of Iſrael*; in a Word, They Out-do that Amazing, and Irremiſſible Sin, of *the Son of Perdition*, the Arch-Traytor *Judas* himſelf, in that, they *Dayly ſell* and *betray* their *Lord and Saviour*, for *Money*. And wou'd not (think Ye) the *Primitive Church* have *Thundr'd* out its *Anathema's*, againſt ſuch *Daring*, and *Inſolent Offenders*? Wou'd it not have *ſpew'd* theſe *Vipers* out of Her *Communion*, whoſe *crying Sins* call aloud to *Heaven*, for that *Juſt Vengeance*, they have not *yet* found upon *Earth*?

Thus Fatally can the Dominion of *Intereſt* Sway Mens *Faith*, and *Practice*, and *ſuborn* both, to the *Mammon of Unrighteouſneſs*. For a Man to quit his *Temporal* Honours, and Eſtate in *This Life*, for another in *Reverſion* in the *Next*, is ſuch an Uneaſy *Exchange* of *Title*, that Our *Bleſſed Saviour* himſelf cou'd not (*humanly* ſpeaking) Perſwade the *Rich Man* in the *Goſpel*, to Comply with, tho' We are told, He was no *Ordinary Proficient* in Piety.

And

And where *Intereſt*, and *Religion*, come to ſtand in *Competition*, there are not *Few* who would follow His *Example*, and *Turn their Backs* upon their *Saviour*. Inſomuch that the *Devil* thought himſelf ſecure of Betraying the very *Son of God*, when He gave him the *pompous View*, and alluring Promiſe of *this World*. Which really are Temptations, that induce *Good*, as well *Great Men*, ſometimes to *Fall down*, and *Worſhip*, and which require no ſmall Pitch of *Vertue*, and *Reſolution*, to Baffle, and Withſtand. This is the *tendereſt* Part of Nature, and no wonder if it ſometimes gives way, when 'tis Aſſaulted on the *Weakeſt* ſide. How often have We ſeen, when a *ſhining Preferment* has *Dazl'd*, and *Warm'd* the *Conſcience*, of ſome Ambitious, or Indigent Perſons, how wonderfully it has *Softn'd*, and *Relax'd* their *Rigid Principles*, and ſuddenly, and almoſt as effectually Wrought a *Converſion* in their Opinions, as the Light that from Heaven *ſtruck down* St. *Paul*? It requires indeed a full Conviction, of the Infallible *Truth* of Our *Principles*, and the *Merit* of Our *Cauſe*, and a Stanch *Reſolution*, rais'd upon the ſerious Deliberation of Both, with a lively Senſe of Our *Obligations* to, and an awful Fear of GOD's Juſtice, to keep Men *ſtedfaſt Unmoveable*, and *inflexibly Perſevering* in

their

their *Religious Sentiments.* Yet notwithſtanding the Difficulty, it will be ſtill found to be as much our *True Intereſt*, as *Real Duty*, upon which a *Good Conſcience* always keeps its Eye fixt and Unwavering, and is like the GOD that it ſerves, *without Variableneſs, or Shadow of Change.* It conſults its *Innocence*, not its *Security*, Follows *Chriſt* to the *Croſs*, as well as to the *Crown*, and is as Ready to *ſuffer for*, as to *Reign with* Him. It maintains a conſtant, and Uniform Courſe of *Integrity*, never Deviating from it ſelf, and the plain Road of *Truth* and *Honeſty.* It knows no *Latitude*, *comprehenſive Shifts*, or *Doubles*, in its Principles, but is, as the *Object* of its Worſhip, *the ſame to day, to morrow, and for ever.*

2. The *Second Thing* that Deceives Us under the Pretence of *Conſcience* is *Prejudice* *. This is an *Infant Principle*, that takes Root deep *in the Man*, and ſpreads large in the *Underſtanding*; like the *Muſtard-ſeed* in the *Goſpel*, that from a ſlender, and Minute Grain, ſhoots up, and Enlarges into the Boughs, and Branches, of a Tree. From a Little, and inſenſible Beginning, it riſes up to a Firm, ſtrong, and *Irradicable Habit* in the Soul, and

* This Subject I've treated on at large in another Diſcourſe.

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being join'd with *Pride*, *Obſtinacy*, and *Self-Love*, is made almoſt Inſeparable from it. From hence 'tis, that ſo Great a Part of the World, owe thoſe few Notions of *Conſcience*, and *Religion*, that they have, either to the *Faſhions*, and *Cuſtoms*, of the Country they are Born in, or to the *Methods*, and Ways of *Education*, in which They are Bred; nay, ſome to the *Callings*, and *Profeſſions*, in which they are Accidentally Train'd up, not a few to the *Converſation*, and *Company*, that they keep, others to the *Authority* of ſuch Perſons as they Confide in, and others to their Own *Conſtitution*, *Singularity*, and *Condition*. And how hardly are Men brought to Search Impartially into the Truth, and Foundation of their Opinions; and therefore much more, to Relinquiſh thoſe *Principles*, which they have *cheriſh'd*, as the Rules of their Conduct, and *Darling Friends* ſo long? They had rather Believe with an *Implicit Faith*, take their *Creed* by *Report*, and venture its *Conſequence*, than be at the *Trouble*, and *Uneaſineſs*, of *canvaſſing* its *Articles*. Thus *Error* being firſt Entertain'd, Pleads *Preſcription* againſt *Truth*, and injoying a long *Prepoſſeſſion* in the Mind, Uſurps its Place, and excludes its Entrance, ſtops up the Paſſage of *Reaſon*, and the Avenues of Conviction; it Ingroſſes the *Intellectual Man*, makes him Peeviſh, and

Sour, Perverſe, and Reſtive, and Incapacitates Him for *Reformation*. And no wonder, when his *Judgment* is thus baſely *Brib'd*, and *Retain'd*, that it gives him *Wrong Counſel;* and like a *Deceitful Lawyer*, *Betrays* that *Cauſe*, it ought to *Defend*. A Man may therefore, in this Caſe, have a full Acquieſcence in his *Falſe Sentiments*, and eſteem his *Conſcience Sincere*, and *True*, while He is Inſenſible, that it is Grounded on an *Error*, becauſe the *Miſtake* is *Early* Imbib'd, and has bin *long* receiv'd. And that which makes this Matter, of ſo *perilous* a Conſequence, is, that it may Inſinuate it ſelf into Our *Fundamental Articles*, vitiate and Diminiſh Our *Faith*, and thereby Endanger Our Eternal Salvation. For it is a Truth (tho' ſeemingly *ſevere*) that can never too often be Inculcated, that an *Erroneous Perſwaſion is as Damnable, as an Immoral Life*; it being, almoſt inconceivable, that the *Cauſe* and *Effect* ſhou'd not *correſpond*, that a *Bad Tree ſhould bring forth Good Fruit*, or a Man *Believe Ill*, and at the ſame time *Live Well*. So that there's no Queſtion, but that any one may really think his *Conſcience Upright*, and *Unbiaſs'd*, when 'tis Govern'd by theſe *Prejudices;* and tho' He Acts in *Conformity* to them, find himſelf after his Death, in a Groſs *Miſtake* in the *other* World, and

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Recant when 'tis too late. For, GOD having laid before Us his *Law*, in the moſt *Obvious*, and *Intelligible Terms*, with a Command to *Try*, *Examine*, *Direct*, and *Judge* our *Conſciences* by *That Rule*, has left Us without *Excuſe*, for not ſo Doing, and may Juſtly Inflict an *Eternal Puniſhment* for Our Neglect in this Matter. Neither will here the Pretence of a *Good Intention* any ways *Mitigate* the Crime, *Annul* the *Guilt*, or *Indemnify* the Offender, unleſs only in *Caſes* of *Invincible Ignorance*. Such a Dangerous Misfortune is it, to be *ſet wrong* at firſt, and *ſeaſon'd* with *corrupt Principles*, which may in time gain an Abſolute and uncontroulable Dominion in the Soul, derive a Fatal and Inevitable *Propenſion* upon the *whole Conſcience*, which may Debauch the True *Faith*, and ſubvert the very Foundations of Juſtice and Piety. How *High-flown*, and Liable ſoever, this Doctrine may ſeem to the Reflections of ſome *Latitudinarian Divines*, who place *Morality* above *Faith;* and who wou'd be thought to *Imitate* the *Example*, without *Believing* in, or *Truſting* to the *Merits, and Satisfaction* of their *Redeemer*; it is undeniably evident, from the Expreſs Words of the *Goſpel*, that the *Jews*, who *crucify'd* the *Meſſiah*, and *perſecuted* him after his Death, in his *Apoſtles*, thought themſelves *bound in*

Conſcience, to commit theſe execrable Sins, and that *they did God good Service thereby*. Whereas thoſe very *Apoſtles* always Charge 'em with theſe heinous *Crimes*, as *Unpardonable*, without *Repentance*; for that this *Erroneous Judgment*, tho' proceeding from *Ignorance*, was ſufficient to *conſign* 'em over to Everlaſting *Damnation*, unleſs *Chriſt* Interceded for 'em at the *Right Hand* of GOD, as He did upon the *Croſs*, *Father Forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

3. The *Third Inſtance*, that may Cheat Us under the Appearance of *True Conſcience*, is *Paſſion*. This Impoſes upon Us in a *Thouſand Shapes*, and requires great Sagacity to Diſcover it. It were not Difficult to Dilate on this Copious Subject, and ſhew at large, how the various Repreſentations of *Good* and *Evil*, and thoſe *painted Scenes* of *Pleaſure*, and *Pain*, which they ſo Lively Deſcribe in the *Imagination*, Work up thoſe ſeveral *Senſations*, and *Ideas*, in the *Mind*, which are as 'twere the Internal *Springs*, and *Wheels*, and that ſecret kind of *Mechaniſm*, that *Sets the Whole Man a Going*. Whoever looks into his Own Breaſt, cannot but be Conſcious, how from His *Admiration* and *Deſire*, his *Love* and *Hatred*, his *Joy* and *Sorrow*, his *Anger*

and

and *Pity*, his *Hope* and *Fear*, his *Jealouſy* and *Deſpair*, his *Shame* and *Honour*, his *Envy* or *Diſdain*, &c. all his *Actions*, according to their *different Objects*, are Produc'd, and Regulated. Theſe are the *Cords of a Man*, (as the *Prophet Hoſea Figuratively* expreſſes it) whereby He is vehemently Drawn, and Seduc'd, oftentimes againſt his *Reaſon*, by the powerful Force of his *Inclination*, and *Affection*: Which as 'tis variouſly *Predominant* in Men, *Writhes*, and *Diſtorts* the *Conſcience* into the ſame *Irregular Figure*. *Fear*, the ſtrongeſt, and moſt violent of the *Paſſions*, when once deeply Seated in the *Soul*, *Tyrannizes* over it in a very Inſolent, and Imperious manner; raiſing up *Mean*, and *Unworthy Thoughts* in it, and *Degrading* it to all the *Servile*, and *Pitiful Compliances* in the World. Thoſe *Crude*, and *Unmanly* Notions of Religion, which it produces in ſome Perſons, may be lookt upon, rather as a *Melancholly Indiſpoſition* in the *Blood*, than a *Diſaffection* in the *Underſtanding*, which doubtleſs does in a great Meaſure *Follow*, and *Obey* the *Conſtitution* of the *Body*. Under ſuch a *ſpleenatick Complexion*, the Mind cannot Act *brisk*, and *ſprightly* upon its *Organs*, and *Judge*, and *Reaſon perſpicuouſly* as it ought to do. On the other hand, *Self-ſufficiency*, *Pride*, and a bitter *Zeal* make Men *Supercilious*, *Cruel*, *Aſpiring*,

and

and *Preſuming*; *Arrogant* in *themſelves*, *Inſolent* to their *Neighbours*, and even impudently *Familiar*, and *Sawcy* towards *God*. Now the *Motions* of theſe *Paſſions* being ſo very Turbulent, and Rapid, they *ſilence*, and *drown* the *ſtill Voice* of *Reaſon*, allow it not Time to *Recollect* it ſelf, but *Hurry* it away blindfold into *Sin*. Every other *Paſſion* has its *particular Charm* to *Intoxicate*, and way of *Operation* to *Deceive*, the *Underſtanding*, that it may not Diſtinguiſh betwixt *Specious Sophiſtry*, and the true *Commands* and *Laws* of an *Unbiaſs'd*, and *Uncorrupted Conſcience*.

4. To this of *Paſſion*, may be added another *Cauſe* of *Error* in the *Conſcience*, not much unlike it in Nature, and that is, *Humour*, or *Phancy*, which is the *ſenſual* Operation of a *Whimſical*, and *Deprav'd Will*, which inclines Men through a *Sceptical* Diſpoſition, to Hunt after *Novelties*, fall in Love with odd *Hypotheſes*, and *Conjectures*, Catch at *Phantoms*, and at length ſo far Deceive themſelves, as to *Credit* Their Own *Dreams*, and *Rêveries*. A ſort of *Magick Inchantment* in the *Underſtanding*, a *Romantick Scene* of Life, made up of *Air* and *Invention*, in which Men *Walk* as 'twere *in their Sleep*, and Converſe in a *Viſion*: It uſually Poſſeſſes Men of *ſtrong Imagina-*

tions,

tions, and *Weak Judgments*, and ſo Infatuates the *Reaſon*, that it deprives it of the Power of *Diſtinguiſhing* betwixt *Caprice*, and *Religion*, betwixt the *Spiritual*, and *Natural* Inclinations, or the Motions of the *Superior*, and *Inferior Soul*. This may ſpring perhaps from the *Irregular Heats* of a too *Volatile* and *Diſturb'd* Brain, which may put the *Spirits* into a Confus'd *Ferment*, a Precipitate and Violent *Career*, and thereby give the *Lower Principles* of *Senſation*, a Predominancy over the Powers of *Right Reaſon*. This (as a *Learned Writer*, with a *curious Felicity* of Expreſſion, ſtyles it) may be call'd *an Animal Conſcience*, Ariſing from, and being Govern'd by the *Imagination*, and bearing the ſame Relation to the *Senſitive Repreſentations* of it, as the *True Conſcience* does to the *Intellectual Faculties*, and *Operations*: A moſt Unhappy, and almoſt Incurable Deluſion, which GOD permits ſome *Wilful*, *Self-conceited*, and *Headſtrong* Perſons to fall into; whoſe *Pride*, and *Ignorance*, ſets 'em above the *Wholſom Doctrines*, and *Wiſe Ordinances* of the *Church*, and perſwades 'em to Prefer their Own vain and *ſottiſh Inventions*, before the Eternal *Oracles of Truth*, and the unerring Light of *Divine* Revelation. Whereupon the *Holy Ghoſt* has thought fit to Caution

tion all *ſober Chriſtians*, againſt the *Madneſs* of ſuch *Frantick Zealots*, by ſtigmatizing 'em with that *Juſt*, but *Vile* Character, *of being Deſerted by his Bleſſed Influence, given up to their Own Inclinations, to ſtrong Deluſions, and to the Belief of a Lye:* as it is frequently Obſerv'd of Men much Addicted to ſuch *Obſtinate Humours*, from a long, *Habitual Indulgence* in 'em, they come at laſt to *Impoſe* more upon *Themſelves* than *Others*; and which is the moſt wretched, and Deſpicable Condition, a Mortal can fall under, to *ſwallow their Own Falſhoods*, and *Believe their Own Fictions*. To this Wild, and *Enthuſiaſtick Infatuation*, We ought to Appropriate the Riſe of *Hereſy*, (which on this very account, is doubtleſs, by St. *Paul* reckon'd among *the Works of the Fleſh*, tho' it ſeems to be an *Intellectual* Operation) together with *Bigotry*, and *Phanaticiſm*, which ſome *Fanciful*, *Wayward*, and *Contumacious* Men *Create* in their Brains, and Blaſphemouſly *Chriſten* with the Holy Name of the *Spirit*, and *Conſcience*. Which in truth are Nothing but *Phrenzy*, and the *Lunatick* Productions of *Diſtemper'd Heads:* and what are the *Fatal Effects* of theſe Miſchievous, and *Diabolical Intoxications*, if not kept under a Timely Government, and Reſtraint, ſcarce any *Kingdom* in *Europe*, but can ſadly Teſtify, and *Our*

Own

Own in particular, even to this Day, may *Lament*, and for the future *Deprecate*.

5. The *Laſt Inſtance*, I ſhall produce of a *Miſtaken Conſcience* in the World, is what It calls *Honour*; which, ſince *Religion* is grown *out of Faſhion*, is now become *the Gentleman's Conſcience*. Chriſtianity *forſooth* muſt be Diſcarded by ſome *Men of Honour*, as a *Narrow Inſtitution*, fit only for *Bookiſh Pedants*, that are unacquainted with the *way of the World*: their *Reaſon* muſt be as *Looſe*, and Unconfin'd as their *Lives*; and they ſcorn tamely to ſubmit, to an *Incredible*, and *Myſterious Revelation*, which to their *Refin'd Underſtanding* is *meer Nonſence*, and *Prieſt-craft*; if through an high Strain of *Complaiſance*, they condeſcend to Own any *Natural*, or *Moral Duty*, 'tis well if they mean any thing by it, beſides the *fullfilling* their *Luſts*, and *Pleaſures*: As if they were Born for nothing elſe but *Eaſe* and *Luxury*, and the *World* was made for theſe uſeleſs *Leviathans* to *take their Paſtime therein*: *Fortune*, *Quality* and *Condition*, it ſeems are ſufficient *Priviledges* to give their Poſſeſſors a Diſpenſation from the *Power* and *Obligation* of *Laws*, and to *Exempt* theſe *Favourites of Heaven* (as they deem themſelves) from all their *Penalties*, by a *Peculiar Prero-*

rogative above their *Fellow-Creatures*: As if, by how much the greater *Bounty*, GOD has Beſtow'd upon *them*, ſo much the Leſs *Gratitude* they Ow'd to *him*, and *their Acknowledgments* were ſtill to be *Leſſen'd* by the *Increaſe* of *his Favours*. Theſe are the Perſons, who, by their Own Authority, wou'd *ſuperſede* the *Law of God*, and make *Themſelves*, and their Own *Licentious Wills*, the ſole *Guide*, and *Rule* of their Actions; which, in their *Dialect*, they are pleas'd to *Varniſh* with the Glittering Colour of *Honour*; a Thing, which theſe Empty, and Noiſy, *Pretenders* to, talk as loudly and confidently about, as if they *really* Underſtood what it *Meant*. Whereas (GOD knows) *they* want as much to be Inſtructed in the *true Nature* of *this*, as in *that Religion*, which they ſo *Ignorantly* Laugh at, and ſo *Preſumptuouſly* Deſpiſe. Otherwiſe they wou'd not, in *Defiance* of the Wiſdom of All Laws, *Human*, and *Divine*, ſet up a Senſeleſs Notion of *Bravery*, to Dignify *Malice*, and *Murder*; and take that to be the *Only Satisfaction of the Gentleman*, which muſt be the *Damnation of the Chriſtian*. In ſhort, where Men *Abandon* their *Faith*, and the *Fear of God*, *Conſcience*, and *Honour*, are inſignificant Sounds, and *Deceitful Expreſſions*, which Men that have *Neither*, make uſe of to Impoſe upon thoſe that *have*.

There

There are doubtleſs many Men, who abſtain from the Commiſſion of ſome Impious, and Deteſtable Actions, purely with reſpect to *common* Decency, a Senſe of *Generoſity*, or the Rules of *Good Breeding*, without any Regard had to thoſe of *Religion*, or the *Commands* of GOD. That is, to ſpeak the plain Truth, they Scorn to be Guilty of any thing that may render 'em *Little*, and *Contemptible* in the Eſteem of Men of *Worth* and *Gravity*; ſo that indeed it is their *Character*, not *Integrity*, the *Reputation* and *Applauſe of Men*, not *the Anſwer of a Good Conſcience*, that Governs their *Conduct*. How little are theſe *Gentlemen* acquainted with the ſound Notion of *True Honour*, which is a much more *Exalted Principle*, than they take it for, and Springs from a more *Noble* and *Beautiful Original*? This is not the Degenerate Off-ſpring of *Sin*, or *Villany*, does not ariſe from any Vicious Qualities, as *Pride*, *Hypocriſy*, *Oſtentation*, *Revenge*, or *Ambition*; but is founded upon the *Real Worth*, and *Intrinſick Goodneſs* of Things; Springs from *God*, and *the Law*, the Sole *Fountains* of *Honour*, to whoſe *Precepts*, and *Injunctions*, it always pays a Juſt *Subordination*, and *Final Reference*. This indeed is not ſo much a *Single Vertue* in it ſelf, as the *Seaſoning Qualification*, and Embelliſhment, of *All other Vertues*; Which (to

Draw a Compendious Deſcription of its Lovely Properties) *Sets a Man above All Fear, but that of doing any thing Baſe or Diſhoneſt; which makes Him Abhor, as much to Detract from his Enemy, as to Flatter his Friend; to Scorn Hypocriſy, tho' 'twere for his Intereſt; and Deteſt Injuſtice, tho' it might Gratify his Revenge; which renders him Dutiful and Submiſſive to his Superiors, Affable, Obliging, and Generous even to his Inferiors; and, in a Word, that makes him, on All Occaſions, Exemplify his Steady Loyalty to his Prince, his Inviolable Love to his Country, his untainted Fidelity to his Friend, his open Hoſpitality to Strangers, his Perpetual Charity to the Poor, and his Univerſal Beneficence to All the World.* This is that *charming Character*, which alone Conſtitutes a *Man of True Honour*, who certainly is the *Beſt Man* in the World, next to a *Man of Conſcience*, who ſtill *Riſes higher* in his *Principles*, and makes GOD and *his Duty* the *Sole*, and *Ultimate End* of All his Actions.

Thus I have Run through All thoſe Cauſes, which I take to be the *Grounds* of an *Erroneous*, and *Miſ-guided Conſcience*; all which I have Drawn from the *Nature*, and *Motives*, of *Human Actions*, which is *Reſolving* them into their *Principles*, and (as I humbly Conceive) the

the Beſt, and Trueſt Way of Explaining them. Such as are *Intereſt*, and *Prejudice*, the *Deluſions* of Our ſeveral *Paſſions*, and *Affections*, *Superſtition*, *Pride*, *Fear*, *Ignorance*, and miſtaken *Zeal*, *Imagination*, and *Fancy*, *Reputation*, and *Falſe Honour*: All which are *Wrong Grounds* of *Practice*, and can never properly *Juſtify* Our *Conduct*. We ſee how many *Ways* there are that *Lead* to *Error*; for that *ſingle One*, that *Directs* Us Safely, and Infallibly to *Truth*, and how liable We are to be *Betray'd*, into *Any*, or *All*, of them. And methinks the *Dangerous Conſequence* might Forewarn Us to Beware of Taking up *Falſe Principles* at firſt; for if Theſe are founded on an *Unſound*, and *Treacherous Bottom*, the whole Courſe of Our Lives being Grounded upon *Sin*, and *Error*, muſt needs be One *continued Miſtake*, and ſo inſenſibly carry Us on to, and at length *End* in *Ruine*, and *Confuſion*. So *Bewitching* is the *Impoſture*, We may be *Seduc'd* into it, and not know what We are Doing: *There being a Way* (as the *Wiſe Man* tells Us) that *may ſeem Right in a Man's Own Eyes, when nevertheleſs the End of that way is Death.* And without doubt in this Lamentable Caſe, a Man may Govern the whole Courſe, and Tenour of his Life and Actions by a *Rule*, that may

may thro' *Prejudice*, or a want of *due Examination*, appear *Juſt*, and *True* in his *Own Judgment*, and notwithſtanding find himſelf *Judg'd* of GOD, by a quite *Contrary* one at the *Laſt Day*. This is the *Vaſt*, and *Frightful Danger* of *Founding* Our *Conſcience*, upon *Wrong Principles* in the Beginning, which is the Great, and moſt Common Occaſion of *Error*; but there is *Another*, which tho' not ſo *Frequent*, is however of no leſs Perilous a Conſequence, and that is a *Falſe Application of Right Principles*. In this Caſe, a Man *ſets out well* for his *Journey*, but for want of a *Guide*, or *Conduct*, *Miſtakes* his *Road*, Wanders up and down, is at length *Bewilder'd*, and *Loſt*, and ſo *Falls ſhort* of the *Deſign'd*, *Happy End*, of his Travels. Of ſuch Infinite Concern, and Importance is it, if We wou'd Avoid theſe *Diſmal Miſcarriages*, to make Our Selves throughly Acquainted with the *Nature*, and *Obligation*, of the *Exact Rule* of Our *Actions*, and the *Proper Uſe* that We ſhou'd make of it in the *Application*; which brings Me in the *Laſt* Place,

III. *Thirdly*, To State thoſe *General Laws*, whereby the *Conſcience* is to be *Regulated*, and to ſhew how they Ought to be *Apply'd*. Now the

the Whole *Extent*, and *Obligation* of *Conſcience*, tho' ſeemingly ſo very *Copious*, is Bounded by Theſe *Three Laws*.

1. *The Divine*,
2. *The Political*, and
3. *The Moral Law*.

1. The *Firſt*, being the *Immediate Command* of GOD, is the Great, Supream, and *Tranſcendent Law* of all, wherein is Summ'd up a Full, and *Comprehenſive View*, of Our *Chriſtian Duty*, and the *Will of God*, entirely *Reveal'd* to the World.

2. The *Second* is the *Law* of All *Civil Societies*, by which are to be *Try'd* All *Actions* relating to *Government*, and whatſoever is *Committed betwixt Man, and Man*; which in *Subordination* to the *Firſt*, and if not *Contrary* to it, lays Great Force, and Indiſpenſible *Obligation* of *Duty* upon every *Subject*, this Obligation being *Ratify'd* by the *Divine Law*.

3. The *Laſt* is that *Law*, whereby We are to Try the *Good*, or *Evil*, of Our *Actions*, as they ſtand related to *Vertue*, or *Vice*, and are *founded* upon the *Principles* of *Reaſon*, and the *Light of Nature*. The Other *Two Laws* are

are *Superſtructures* upon *this Law*, which being the Dictate of Nature, *written by God in Our Hearts*, *was*, and is the *Rule* of Our Actions, when ever the Other *two Laws* are *Silent*.

By the *Conformity* of Our Actions to theſe *Three Laws*, as thoſe Actions lie under their *Peculiar Juriſdiction*, and *Cogniſance*, We are to take the *Meaſures* of their *Rectitude*, or *Obliquity*, and Denominate them *Good*, or *Bad*, *Vertuous*, or *Vicious*: and a Man's *Conſcience* may always *Acquit* Him, where it does not appear Obnoxious to one of *theſe Laws*; according to That *Eternal Maxim* of the *Scriptures*, *Where there is no Law, there is no Tranſgreſſion*: Now tho' the *Holy Scriptures* are the *Grand*, *Sovereign Law* of all, ſo that Nothing can be *Authoriz'd* in any *Inferior Law*, that is any ways *Repugnant*, or *Contrary* to That, yet it muſt be Acknowleg'd, not to be, *the Univerſal*, *Adequate Rule of Conſcience*: neither muſt We expect *Every* thing to be *Commanded* therein, which may be the *Injunction* of *Particular Laws*; for this wou'd Superſede, and Fruſtrate their End; neither is there any *Abſolute Neceſſity*, of *Juſtifying* any *Peculiar Law* with *Authority* drawn from the *Scriptures*, unleſs as it is *expreſly Prohibited* therein; or by Manifeſt, and *Undeniable Deductions*,

ductions, concluded from thence to be *Unlawful*.

That theſe *Laws*, take in the *whole Compaſs* of *Humane Duty*, is Evident; in that they Anſwer to the *Three Great Branches*, or *Diſtinct Offices* of it, relating to *God*, Our *Neighbour*, and Our *Selves*. The *Firſt*, ſhewing what We *Owe* to Our *Creatour*, as *Men*, and *Chriſtians*; The *Second*, what We *Owe* to Our *Brethren*, as *Members* of the *Body Politick*, in Our *Publick Capacities*; and the *Third*, what We *Owe* to *Our Selves*, in Our *Private Capacity*; as far as it is Diſcoverable by the *Principles* of *Revelation*, the *Rules* of *Civil Juſtice*, the *Light* of *Nature*, and the *Dictates* of *Reaſon*.

Thus I have given as *Short*, and I hope as *Clear* a View of this *Momentous Point*, as the Time wou'd Allow Me, and to Cloſe up the Whole, ſhall further Intreat Your Patience, whilſt I briefly ſhew, how thoſe *Rules* may be Apply'd:

1. To *Settle* a *Doubtful*,
2. To *Quiet* a *Scrupulous*, and
3. To *Correct* an *Erroneous Conſcience*.

1. And *First*, to *Settle* a *Doubtful Conſcience*. In Order to which, this *Maxim* is to be Obſerv'd, That the *Commands* of Our *Conſcience* ſhould be *always Regarded*, but the *Prohibitions* muſt be *ſtrictly Obey'd*. For We ought as much to *Abſtain* from *Doing* any thing, that is but *Probably Lawful*, as from *Doing* what may be *Poſſibly Unlawful*; becauſe the *Mind* muſt *Act* by its *Light*, *Will*, and *Conſent*. And there is *Great Hazard* lying on *That Side*; whereas upon the *Other*, a Man may be *Satisfy'd* in what He does, and *Runs no great Venture*, at leaſt Falls into *no Sin*, if in the *Matter of Debate*, He has us'd *All Juſt*, and *Requiſite Endeavours*, to *ſatisfy* himſelf about what ſhou'd *Poſſibly* prove *Unlawful*. *Doubt* always *Implies* a *Thought* of *Injuſtice*, and therefore the *Holy-Ghoſt Guards* againſt it, with the moſt *Poſitive*, and *Peremptory* Threat of *Hell*, and *Damnation*: *He that Doubteth* (ſays He) *is Damn'd if He Eat, for whatever is not of Faith, is Sin.* Rom. 14. 23. But in Caſe of *Neceſſity*, where *Two Things* are *Propos'd* to Us to be *Done*, and the Mind *hangs* in *Suſpence* as to the *Apprehenſion* of *Evil*, certainly it muſt place its *Election* where there is the *Leaſt Danger*; for

for here the *Leſs Evil* puts on the *Nature* of *Good:* but where the *Choice* is *Free* to *Act*, or *not* to *Act*, He Flies in the Face of *God*, and *his Own Conſcience*, that Preſumes without a *Full Perſwaſion*. The moſt *Effectual Method*, I know of, to *Settle*, and *Compoſe* the *Doubts* of *Our Conſcience*, is to be *Contented* with thoſe *Probable*, and *Moral Evidences*, that Things are *Capable* of, and to *ſuſpect* the *Illegality* of *Nothing*, but what Lies under a *Poſitive Prohibition*, either from the inconteſtable *Demonſtrations* of *Reaſon*, or the *Expreſs Words* of *Scripture;* according to that Rule of the *Apoſtle* in a *Caſe* of the *ſame Nature*, which may be a *Standing Direction* to Us in all others, *I know, and am perſwaded* (ſays He) *by the Lord Jeſus, that there is nothing Unclean of it ſelf: but to him that Eſteemeth any thing to be Unclean, to him it is Unclean.* Rom. 14. 14.

2. *Secondly*, To *Quiet* a *Scrupulous Conſcience*. And in this Caſe, I think, there is often more need of a *Phyſician*, than a Confeſſor; for the *Body* (as I ſaid before) is Generally more out of *Order*, than the *Soul*. For thoſe *Groundleſs Miſapprehenſions, Miſ-*

giving Jealouſies, and *Imaginary Fears*, that uſually Diſturb its *Repoſe*, are many times, not ſo much the *Reſults* of *Reaſon*, as the *Natural* Effects of *Vapors*, and *Melancholly*; and what are to be *Cur'd*, rather by a *Corporeal*, than a *Mental* Application. If they are not *Prejudicial* to the *Health* of *the One*, they can ſcarce *affect* that of the *Other*; and Deſerve, in Some Caſes, to be *Anſwer'd* with *Neglect*, and *Contempt*. However, it is the *Duty* of ſuch Perſons, whoſe *Juſt Scruples* proceed from the *Ignorance* of, or *Miſtakes* in, the *Knowledge* of the *Means* of *Salvation*; or from the terrible *Dread* of GOD's *Judgments*, and the *Conſciouſneſs* of their Own Manifold *Iniquities*; to have Recourſe to thoſe *Spiritual Guides* only, whom *Chriſt*, and *his Church* has ſet over them, to *Watch for Their Souls*; that from *Them* they may Receive Sound *Inſtruction* in their *Faith*, Fatherly *Advice* in their *Conduct*, and *Ghoſtly Conſolation* in their *Troubles*. And let all ſuch Perſons reſt aſſur'd, that the *Ruine* of their *Souls*, will as inevitably follow, as the *Deſtruction* of their *Bodies*, if at any time they Preſume to *Truſt* the *State* of either, with *Itinerant Quacks*, and Pretending, Ignorant *Empiricks* in *Phyſick*, or *Divinity*.

3. *Laſt-*

3. *Lastly*, to *Correct* an *Erroneous Conscience*. In order to which this *Maxim* must be Observ'd: That the *Conscience Misapprehending* the *Nature* of any thing, may from its being *Essentially Good*, or *Indifferent*, render it *Accidentally*, and *Relatively Evil*, to the *Person* so *Erring* in his *Conceptions*. But on the contrary, no *Misapprehension* of the *Conscience*, can render any thing that is *Evil*, or *Illegal*, *in it self*, any ways *Good*, or *Valid*. For a Man may be *Bound* by his *Opinion*, in the *One Case*, but can never by *It*, *Justify* himself, or Alter the *Unchangeable*, and *Intrinsick* Nature of Things in the *other*. It is a most Wretched, Unhappy, and *Slavish Condition* to Follow an *Erroneous Guide*; for which way soever We take, either *With*, or *Against*, This *Erring Conscience*, We are Concluded under an *Unavoidable Necessity* of *Sinning*: for if We *Obey* its *Commands*, We *Neglect* Our *Duty*; and if We *Do Our Duty*, We *sin against* Our *Judgment*. And tho' it may seem *safest* to *Transgress* upon the Side of *Conscience*, yet the *Mistake* of *That*, can never be a *Plea* for *Unjustifiable Actions*. What a *Fatal Dilemma* does the Devil, and a Man's Own *Folly* bring Him into in this Case!

Caſe! He caſts a *ſtumbling Block*, and *a Rock of Offence* before Himſelf, which He cannot Avoid *Falling*, and *Splitting*, upon. So unhappily do ſome Men *Fetter* themſelves with their *Own Notions*, and lay ſuch *Chains*, and *Burdens* upon their *Conſciences*, as they are not Able to bear. There is but One Way to get out of this *Helliſh Snare*, and that is *to Break theſe Bonds, and caſt theſe Cords from Us*: To *Examine* throughly Our *Principles*, and to *Rectify* Our *Judgments*; to Diveſt Our Selves of *Intereſt*, *Prejudice*, and *Affection*; to keep the *Upper Region* of the *Soul*, Clear, and *Serene*, neither *Clouded* by *Luſt*, nor Diſcompos'd with the *Heats* of *Paſſion*; for theſe never fail to *Stupify*, and *Beſot* the Mind, and will in time, not only make the *Conſcience* Inſenſible, but (in the *Elegant Language* of the *Scripture*) *Sear it with a Red-hot Iron*. To prevent which Lamentable Condition, We muſt frequently *Retire* into Our Selves, to *State*, and *Adjuſt* the *Great Accounts* betwixt GOD and Our *Souls*; that no *Crime* may paſs *Unretracted*, no *Slip Unobſerv'd*, no *Infirmity Uncorrected*, no *Preſumptuous Sin, Unſubdued*. Thus We ſhall Preſerve a *Tender* and *Quick Senſe* upon the Mind; the

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leaſt *Approaches* of *Vice*, will *Alarm*, and *Rouſe* its Faculties; that no *Temptation* may *ſurprize*, no *Paſſion* entice it into Guilt. Since it is ſo *Eaſily Betray'd* into, and ſo *Difficultly Reclaim'd out* of an *Error*, We cannot with too ſevere Circumſpection *Watch* over all its *Motions*, *Obey* all its *Checks*, and Revere its *Verdict* and *Sentence*. Which Labour however, will be Amply *Rewarded* with the Bliſsful, and *Rejoicing Teſtimony of a good Conſcience, that in Simplicity, and Godly Sincerity, not with Fleſhly Wiſdom, but by the Grace of God, We have ſo had Our Converſation in this World*, that Our *Converſation* will be always (what it has bin in ſome Meaſure here too) in *Heaven*. Upon this Depends all the Tranquillity, Peace, and Enjoyment of *this Life*; as well as the *Happineſs* of the *Next*. For the Reviling Clamours, and Upbraiding Reproaches of a *Wounded Spirit who can Bear*? When that which ſhou'd *ſuſtain a Man's Infirmities*, is *it ſelf* Broken and Confounded, what can *Support* him, thus Bereav'd of his *Laſt Comfort*, and left Deſtitute of the very *Pillar*, and *Bottom* that He muſt *Stand* upon? He muſt Inevitably *Sink*, that thus *Fails* in the *Foundation*. So much

much is it Our *Interest*, as well as *Duty*, if We ever think to Bear up againſt the *Calamities* of *This World*, or go with Satisfaction into the *Next*, and Manfully meet Death in its moſt Ghaſtly Viſage, *herein continually to Exerciſe Our Selves, to keep a Conſcience void of Offence towards God, and towards Men.*

FINIS.